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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000001

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SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH LEADERS HOPE FOR MORE LOCAL AUTONOMY FROM NEW NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Both the Diwaniyah Governor and Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) Head expressed a desire for more local autonomy under the new Iraqi Government in separate meetings on December 29. Each was optimistic regarding the quick formation of a national unity government, although the SCIRI head cautioned that all parties in the new National Assembly (NA) must act according to their "real size and real abilities." End summary.

¶2. (C) Diwaniyah Governor Khalil Jalil Hamza Al-Hamawi told REO Al-Hillah staff in a December 29 meeting that what his province needed most from the newly elected National Assembly was "decentralization." Al-Hamawi said that given more local autonomy, the provincial government would be better equipped to rebuild infrastructure, undertake reconstruction projects and provide jobs. He said that as soon as the final results of the December 15 elections were revealed, he and other provincial officials would formally brief Diwaniyah's eight newly-elected NA representatives on the needs of the province, with decentralization being first on the list. (Note: Early election returns indicate that the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, ballot number 555) won all eight of Diwaniyah's seats. End note.)

¶3. (C) In a separate meeting, Shaykh Hussein Al-Khalidi, a member of the Provincial Council and the provincial head of SCIRI, an organization within the UIA coalition, said the same thing regarding Diwaniyah's agenda in the new NA. It is the Provincial Council and the local government that is responsible for providing services to the people of Diwaniyah, Al-Khalidi maintained. "This is achieved by getting more authority from Baghdad, to give us more space, to provide these services," Al-Khalidi avowed.

¶4. (C) Both officials were optimistic that a new national government would be formed quickly. Governor Al-Hamawi predicted it would take less time than the "three months or so" it took to form the transitional government after the January 2005 elections. Al-Khalidi, while reluctant to express an exact timetable, opined that formation would be settled "sooner than others expect."

¶5. (C) Al-Hamawi, who is affiliated with the Badr Organization, also a constituent group within the UIA coalition, related his desire to see "a national unity government with all components of the Iraqi people, to achieve economic, political and security stability." He said that he was confident that the national leaders of the various political lists were discussing such a government.

¶6. (C) Shaykh Al-Khalidi was slightly less magnanimous. While he reported his opinion that all of the elements within the UIA coalition believe in a national unity government, he qualified this by saying that there must be balance based on each coalition's electoral performance. "Each party should realize, and know, its real size and real abilities," Al-Khalidi cautioned. "And thus, each can play its natural role."

¶7. (C) When asked to predict the identity of the new prime minister, Al-Khalidi sounded a more inclusive note. "I don't look at the person, I look at the interests of the nation of Iraq. We want to see a person acceptable to Kurds, Sunnis, and the United States," he offered. "If one side is not satisfied with the prime minister, this will be a problem and an obstacle on our way forward." In spite of this statement, Al-Khalidi seemed to indicate an unwillingness to consider a prime minister from outside the UIA umbrella by asking REO staff if the U.S. would prefer current Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari or Deputy President Adel Abdul Mehdi, a SCIRI official, as prime minister in the new government.

¶8. (C) Comment: Shi'a officials in other South Central provinces have voiced the same wish for increased local autonomy. Most seem to be eager primarily for the opportunity to exercise more control over money slated for reconstruction and job creation programs. End comment.

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